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NEW SYSTEM OF SUPERVISION SET UP FOR HAWAIIAN REFUGE

For the first time since its establishment in 1909, the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, which extends for 1,500 nautical miles northwest from Honolulu, now has a satisfactory system of supervision, according to an announcement made today by Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman.

This has been achieved through an agreement entered into by the Territorial Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry and the Fish and Wildlife Service which provides for the joint administration and supervision of this island group to safeguard its distinctive bird and animal life.

Under this agreement the Territorial Board is authorized to superimpose refuge status on the island group under Territorial regulations, issue permits for entry and economic uses, post the area with Fish and Wildlife Service boundary markers, and make such wildlife surveys as personnel and opportunities will allow. Conservation officers, as designated by the Board, will be appointed as deputy game management agents to enforce the Federal laws and regulations. The Fish and Wildlife Service will continue to issue permits for the taking of specimens for scientific purposes, based on Board recommendations.

The refuge area consists of uninhabited lava islands or coral reefs. Included are a number of famous bird-nesting rocks and islands, particularly Laysan Island on which the Laysan teal and Laysan finch continue to survive although the flightless rail, the miller bird, and honey creeper have become extinct. These islands protect the largest nesting colonies of albatross in the Northern Hemisphere.

The Executive order of President Theodore Roosevelt, which established this refuge on February 3, 1909, included about a dozen islands or reefs extending northwest nearly to Midway. Laysan Island, largest in the group, contains 288 acres. It is a coral atoll measuring about 3 by 1½ miles, with the highest point being only 50 feet above sea level. The center of the island is occupied by a lagoon, the former habitat of the flightless Laysan rail. The Laysan teal is still represented by about 30 birds, while the Laysan finch has increased considerably.

In 1902, the bird population on Laysan was estimated to be between 7 and 10 million. By 1911, through the appalling destruction of these birds for plumes, the population was reduced to only about one million birds. Many of the 23 species known to the island were further reduced in numbers when rabbits destroyed most of the vegetation. The eradication of these rabbits, liberated in 1903, was undertaken in 1923 and apparently was successful.

The native Hawaiian seal is found only in the refuge area and was at one time considered nearly extinct. The present population numbers more than 100 on Laysan Island with considerably lesser numbers on the other islands of the refuge.

Several important ornithological expeditions have been made to these islands. Scientists of the former Bureau of Biological Survey visited Laysan in 1902 to make observations on the habits of the birds found there. The first comprehensive study, however, was made in 1911, under the joint auspices of the Bureau of Biological Survey and the University of Iowa. This was followed by the investigations of Dr. Alexander Wetmore in 1923 and the Whitney South Sea Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History in 1936.

In 1951, the George Vanderbilt Pacific Equatorial Expedition visited Laysan Island and obtained population counts. A representative of the Hawaiian Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry accompanied this expedition. The success of this survey indicated the desirability of continuing these studies at regular intervals as a necessary measure for protecting the birds within this isolated and widespread archipelago.

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